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ABSTRACT

To help principals with the supervisory part of their job, this tipsheet offers advice from industry and education experts. From Maxine H. Bishop and Lester R. Bittle comes a definition of supervision that distinguishes conceptual skills from human relations-interpersonal skills and findings from an industry study that identify six common supervisory pitfalls. Tips for improving human relations are provided by three educators-consultants (James Huge, David E. Lee, and Shirley Boes Neill) in the form of lists of personal qualities and professional skills needed by good supervisors. In conclusion, the importance of monitoring employee performance is noted and some techniques for employee motivation are suggested. (SL)

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HOW TO BE A BETTER SUPERVISOR

Tips for Principals from NASSP

February 1983

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How To Be a Better Supervisor

Instead of griping about the boss, you're now the boss. . . .
Instead of griping about policy, you're the one who must implement policy. . . .
Instead of just waiting for someone to appraise you, you're the one who must do the appraisal of others.

Martin Broadwell wrote that summary in *The New Supervisor* (Second Edition) to reflect the dilemmas and the opportunities that face supervisors in business and industry. But it also applies to principals, whose jobs include supervisory as well as administrative functions.

Like supervisors in other lines of work, most principals have come up through the ranks and their training for the job has focused on administrative, rather than supervisory, duties.

Following are tips to make the supervisory part of your job a little easier:

Definition and Duties

Supervision, according to a commonly accepted definition, "is the art of accomplishing work through the efforts and abilities of other people." In fact, said Maxine H. Bishop in *Dynamic Supervision: Problems and Opportunities*, "the difference between a good and a poor supervisor may be the ability to work effectively with people in solving problems."

Is such ability innate? No, apparently not. Volumes have been written to help supervisors learn necessary skills. Bishop breaks these skills into two broad categories: conceptual skills and interpersonal skills. A good supervisor must have both, she says.

Conceptual skills include planning; organizing (figuring out, for example, the best use of available people, resources, time); directing (pointing the way or motivating staff, communicating with them, and serving as their leader); and controlling (knowing what is going on, soon enough, well enough, to do something about wrong directions).

Interpersonal skills are also called human relations skills, or the ability to get along with people.

How much attention should a principal give to each type of skill? "Good supervisors know they must pay as much attention to human relations matters as to technical and administrative matters. In other words," advises Lester R. Bittle, author of the best-selling textbook on supervision, *What Every Supervisor Should Know*, "be as employee-centered as you are job- or task-centered in your interest." Time spent maintaining group cohesiveness, direction, and morale, according to Bittle, is as worthwhile as that spent on administrative functions.

Bittle reinforces his conviction by quoting the results of a study of 85 companies conducted by the National Management Association. It revealed the six supervisory pitfalls that commonly cause supervisors to fail:

- Poor personal relations with workers or with other management people
- Individual shortcomings such as lack of initiative and emotional instability
- Lack of understanding of the management point of view
- Unwillingness to spend the necessary time and effort to improve
- Lack of skill in planning and organizing work
- Inability to adjust to new and changing conditions.

Like their counterparts in business and industry, educators who advise on supervisory skills often emphasize how difficult and rewarding the use of good human relations skills can be: difficult because of the absolute necessity of knowing and using many different approaches with individuals or groups; rewarding because good supervision can result in growth and fulfillment for both employees and supervisor. This, in turn, can build a strong staff, more capable and willing to provide top-notch education to students.

Human Relations Tips

So, what can you do? A variety of suggestions come from James Huge, a former teacher and principal in Nebraska and Kansas, who is now a popular speaker on the topic of leadership and motivation. He prefaces his talks to administrators with this bit of advice from Carter Administration official Bert Lance: "If it ain't broken, don't fix it." In other words, he says, "examine what you are already doing. Don't pick up every idea simply because it was suggested; pick it up if you need it, and then adapt it to your own style."

Drawing on his own experience and research, Huge lists skills exhibited by effective principals in their roles as supervisors and leaders:

- They care a great deal about those with whom

they work, and they find a comfortable way, within their own style, to let those people know they care. To care, Huge says, you have to know everyone with whom you work well enough to know what makes them tick. He gives this example of caring: "One of the highest forms of caring is to let those teachers who are not performing well know that you consider their performance inadequate and support them in improvement efforts."

- They are confident, but humble. "You have to be confident because people follow people who, they think, know where they are going. But these same people will not follow you or get turned off, if you go too far or get overconfident or cocky."
- They laugh a lot. "It's a leadership skill, a survival skill."
- They already have or they develop superb listening skills.
- They are flexible and *inconsistent*—not in goals or discipline—but in what they do to solve a problem.
- They are excellent time managers.
- They seek new ideas, are comfortable sharing new ideas, and encourage the same thing among their teachers.

Additional advice comes from Louisiana principal David E. Lee. Speaking to principals at an NASSP convention, Lee said "good supervision comes out of your dealings with your staff and your peers. There's no magic kit it comes from." He offered these additional tips:

- Change doesn't come quickly in the supervisory process. Be patient.
- As a supervisor, you must set standards so people know what you want them to do.
- Visibility is one of the greatest assets you have as a supervisor of instruction. Both the teachers and the students should see you often and expect to see you often.
- Don't take the entire responsibility yourself when something doesn't go right. Teachers have to take some of the responsibility.
- Versatility, flexibility, optimism, and good communication skills are musts in the supervisory process.
- You've got to be sincere. Do what you say you are going to do, and keep promises.
- Develop a sense of timing. Knowing when to do something can be as important as knowing how to do something.

The Most Difficult Part of the Job

For many supervisors, the most difficult part of their job is to evaluate the performance of an employee. But any supervisor who is not able to make a definitive appraisal of an employee's work is not discharging his or her full responsibility. Overlooking poor performance lowers the standards for the school and for all other employees, and it actually harms the inept person who is allowed to get by.

Two points are important to remember: 1.) If the supervisor keeps employees informed on a continuing basis of how well they are doing, where the weak spots are, and means of improvement, written evaluations are simply affirmations of what has already been discussed and worked on. 2.) The supervisor has an obligation to help employees improve. This requires knowledge of motivation techniques appropriate for each individual employee.

Among the techniques supervisors can draw on to motivate both good and below-par employees are: compliments, awards, showing a real interest in the individual and his or her job, smiling, using the person's name, talking about subjects of special interest to the person, and letting the person know how his or her actions can help you.

Some supervisors also successfully use these techniques: appealing to the pride of an individual or group, getting individuals to make a commitment, and challenging them.

Experts also highly recommend that supervisors give praise—judiciously and honestly—for a job well done.

How Do You Measure Up?

Teachers and other staff members value supervisors who:

—Clearly state expectations and assist employees in meeting them
—Are honest, consistent, and aboveboard in all dealings with staff
—Are around when they are needed
—Communicate necessary information, as soon as it is available and before it gets distorted by the grapevine
—Recognize and are openly appreciative of extra effort, good results, attempts to improve
—Ask teachers their opinions and involve them meaningfully in decisions that affect them
—Make their own judgment of each person's ability, rather than depend on hearsay or the perceptions of the previous supervisor
—Hold themselves, as well as employees, accountable for their performance.

Written by Shirley Boes Neill, Carmichael, Calif.

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